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Weinberger Reports A Russian Attempt To Steal a Scanner

WASHINGTON, Oct. 7 (UPI) — Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger said Thursday that the Soviet Union had tried to steal a top-secret radio frequency scanner used in spy planes and reconnaissance satellites but that United States agents had foiled the effort.

While Mr. Weinberger gave no details, Pentagon officials said the incident occurred early this year when Treasury Department agents working under cover detected the attempt to smuggle the device out of the United States.

The instrument, manufactured by a concern in Anaheim, Calif., is used to scan radio frequencies and pick up voice communications from the ground, officials said. They declined to identify the manufacturer.

The device was to have been flown out of the country on a corporate jet that first went to Mexico, said the officials, who requested anonymity. But the United States agents substituted sandbags for the instrument, which was in packages, after it was put aboard a plane in California, the officials said.

It was not clear whether the smugglers had been apprehended.

Mr. Weinberger mentioned the incident in remarks prepared for delivery to the American League for Exports and Assistance in the context of asserting the need for the United States to tighten controls over the transfer of technology to the Soviet Union.

Tell of Soviet Spy Network

He made the comments 24 hours after American officials meeting with their allied counterparts in Paris said the Kremlin had created a new spy network to steal Western technological secrets and apply them to military uses.

"In another case," Mr. Weinberger said, "they tried to steal a multispectral scanner, which is indispensable to military air and satellite reconnaissance. Fortunately, it was intercepted as it was being smuggled out of the country on a corporate aircraft."

"When the Soviets steal scientific ideas, a lucrative target of their spying in the United States, it is more difficult to apprehend them."

Mr. Weinberger has been at the forefront of efforts by the Reagan Administration to halt the transfer of Western technology to the Soviet Union, ranging from computer chips to ball bearings.

He said the United States had had to reject offers from allies to buy high-technology items because of a concern that they might wind up in Soviet hands.

"As we tighten our own safeguards over technology, we must be prepared for the Soviets to target our friends and allies even more heavily," Mr. Weinberger said. "The restrictions we have applied to our security assistance program have one purpose — to ensure that we do not sell the Soviets the rope to hang us."